

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT - ACADEMIC ADVISER INTERACTIONS: A
COMMUNICATION AUDIT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

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Changing parameters in the worldwide environment have necessitated the adoption, innovation, and internationalization of higher education. The rapid advances in transportation and the instantaneity in communication have increased the need for international and intercultural understanding, adding to the urgent priority to internationalize. One of the methods through which higher educational institutions internationalize is by receiving foreign students. This has brought in competition among higher education institutions and their efforts to attract top academic talent in the world is an indication of this competitiveness. Since the international student population is established as one of the key publics of the university, it is necessary to create effective, strategic communications to build student-adviser relationships. Based on the literature reviewed, if positive relational outcomes are considered to have a favorable effect on the organization's image and positive WOM intentions, this study posited that communication behaviors between international students and university personnel, as constructs of organization-public relationships, will create favorable outcomes on the university reputation. This qualitative study examined the communication patterns of international students with university personnel and its effect on student satisfaction of the university and their WOM intentions.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There is continued competition for receiving international students among the top destination countries (Green & Koch, 2015). At the institutional level, and even within national systems of higher education and international level, prestige, influence, revenue from the fee paid, and greater access to funding are gained through competitive advantage (Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012). To stand out in this increasingly competitive market, many institutions leverage their international profile by highlighting this dimension of their institutions in their websites and promotional materials, ensuring that this aspect is brought to the attention of prospective students and other stakeholders. In competitive internationalization among nations across the world, governments render support to existing or emerging institutions through competitive funding schemes, and encourage the recruitment and retention of top academic talent. By learning how international students' satisfaction with the university influences their perception of the reputation of the university, and thereby their word of mouth intentions, universities can focus on enhancing the academic engagement of this population in order to leverage them to gain an advantage in the global market.

Statement of Purpose

Higher education institutions in the United States are increasingly developing strategies to attract the top academic talent in the world and to position their institution in the global education market. There are several financial and non-financial benefits for the university in admitting and retaining international students. Therefore, it is vital to recognize this group as one of the key publics of a university. The purpose of this creative project is to examine the organization-public relationships between Ball State University and its international graduate students, and provide recommendations in order to enhance relationship-building

communications, thereby positively influence the international students' perception of the university's reputation and their word of mouth intentions.

Significance of Study

Relationship-building communications between international students and their advisers are significant because they interact on a more regular basis, compared with other university personnel. Often times, advisers and professors that a student is in constant contact with become the face of the institution. Therefore, it is necessary to examine these relationships. Literature under this topic is also scarce, making this an essential topic to be explored. The international graduate student population is examined in this study because they are more likely to interact with their professors and advisers on a regular basis.

Definitions

International student: a student who is not an American citizen and is enrolled full-time at an American higher education institution.

Adviser: a faculty adviser in the student's major department, or the student's master's capstone project adviser, or a student's graduate assistantship supervisor, or an international student adviser.

Communication: Any formal or informal communication that is done through email, phone, and face-to-face in the university setting.

Organization of Paper

The paper is organized by six chapters and three appendices. Chapter one introduces the purpose of providing recommendations for relationship building communications between international graduate students and their advisers. The chapter continues with the significance of study, and scope and limitations, along with definitions of some terms used in

this paper. Chapter two is a review of related literature, including international students, internationalization, organizational reputation and relational satisfaction, academic advising and satisfaction, and word of mouth intentions. The chapter ends with the research questions that were raised. Chapter three provides the methodology of the project, with an overview of the design of the project. Chapter four reports the results and from the collected data and its analysis. Chapter five provides the recommendations for relationship building communications based on the results and discussions of the research and the comments of two outside evaluators. Chapter six contains the discussion and implications. The appendix contains the IRB approval letter, informed consent document, and the study protocol.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Summary of Project

International students are individuals who have demonstrated potential and academically feature in the top percentages in their countries of origin. They not only bring intellectual prowess to American campuses but also bring financial advantages to universities that are increasingly facing funding cuts from the state and federal governments. Higher education institutions are looking to offset their expenditure by admitting and enrolling students who are able to pay higher fees, at the same time bringing cultural diversity and global perspectives into the academic curriculum. One of the many ways that international students hear about American universities before applying to them is through word of mouth communications from the university's international alumni. Since experiences with the university, especially through relational interactions with university personnel, have an influence on satisfaction and word of mouth intentions, relationship-building communications could be improved in order to increase positive perceptions.

Internationalization

Universities are described as complex organizations having a set of characteristics that are distinct and that have a strong impact on the institution's culture (Sporn, 1996).

Internationalization in higher education is defined as,

the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment. (Ellingboe, 1998, p. 199)

This process of integrating an international perspective involves five integral components, one of which is “the presence and integration of international students, scholars and visiting faculty into campus life” (p. 205). While internal stakeholders are varied and numerous,

international students are an integral part of it (Bartell, 2003). Although developing and fostering international competence among students have been perceived to be non-essential in the past when the U. S. enjoyed a self-contained economy, changing parameters in the worldwide environment have necessitated the adoption, innovation, and internationalization of higher education. Internationalization has become a strategic priority in the 21st century for numerous universities across the United States. The rapid advances in transportation and the instantaneity in communication have increased the need for international and intercultural understanding, adding to the urgency. Commercial advantage, language and knowledge acquisition, and enhancing the curriculum with international content are some of the motivations of internationalization, while cross-border collaborations, branch campuses, establishing international programs are some of the initiatives in the mover towards internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

An important indicator of the degree of internationalization in higher education is international student mobility, i.e., the reception of foreign students and sending of domestic students abroad (Kehm, 2005). The value of the flow of international students to the American society and the institutions they attend is immense (Lambert, 1995). Two basic goals connected to receiving international students are, (a) the domestic students who do not or will not go abroad are given the opportunity to learn about foreign cultures through mingling with international students at their university, and (b) international students will develop a connection with their host countries, and thereby favor businesses from this country for future investment opportunities after their return (Kehm, 2005). Although it was found that perceptions of cultural differences contributed to the hostility towards foreign teaching assistants, Americans appeared to value the intellectual and cultural contributions the international students bring to the

community (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). “Foreign students add to the racial/ethnic diversity of the student body and they share their knowledge of different countries, social and political systems, and cultural customs and practices” (p. 626). American students’ substantial interaction with international students contributed to their serious questioning of beliefs and values, which had a positive relationship with their general education, leadership skills, and intellectual development (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Overall, international diversity was found to support development goals of higher education and the intellectual and social goals of internationalization. International students also have the potential to play an important role in the expanding U. S. innovation (Chellaraj, Maskus, & Mattoo, 2008). Statistical estimates showed that a 10 percent increase in foreign graduate students would raise the number of patent applications by 4.5 percent, university patent grants by 6.8 percent and non-university patent grants by five percent.

Internationalization has also brought in competition among higher education institutions and their international rankings are an indication of this competitiveness and so are the efforts to attract top academic talent in the world (Rumbley, et al., 2012). Earning revenue, by charging higher fees, is yet another key motive in the move towards internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Research and teaching services are also provided by international graduate students for a modest compensation, same as their American counterparts. Although some international students receive federal aid for their education in American campuses, the majority of the funds for 72 percent of all international students come from sources outside the United States (Institute of International Education, 2015). These sources include personal and family funds, assistance from their home country government and universities. As federal and state funding for American universities decline, the institutions continue to recruit out-of-state and

international students, who are required to pay higher fees (Webley, 2012). The financial pressure has also made colleges and universities less willing to subsidize international students, particularly in the undergraduate level (Lambert, 1995). Those undertaking recruitment trips to foreign countries have reported increasingly interest in applicants who are able to cover the full costs of their education from their own resources. Recruiters, nowadays, go to places where wealthy families who can provide for their children's educations can be found and are less likely to visit developing countries where the market for full-paid students is the "weakest."

The number of international students that individual countries and institutions of higher education attract has been used as an indicator of the reputation and the attractiveness of their educational purveyance (Kehm, 2005). Comparatively, higher education institutions across the world, that have a reputation to be centers of excellence, attract more applications from international students than their lesser known counterparts. The domain of international student recruitment is inherently complex, costly, and competitive, and is also increasingly becoming integral to the financial health of many institutions (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Recruitment efforts are expected to be delivered in a shorter time-frame, with tighter budgets. There is a need for institutions to invest in understanding the decision-making process of their prospective students and monitor the effectiveness of their recruitment channels. A deeper understanding of global mobility trends and their relationship to the applicant pipeline will help institutions channel their international student recruitment efforts. Institutions that are strategic, deliberate and informed in their recruitment efforts will maximize the opportunities in an efficient manner.

International Students

The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2008) defines "international students" as those students that "left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study".

The U. S. played host to the largest number of college degree-level international students, hereinafter referred to as “international students”, in 2012, receiving 18 percent of the total number of outbound mobile students in the world (UIS, 2014). In the 2014-2015 academic year a total of 974,926 international students enrolled in American colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2015). The number of international students in 2014-2015 grew by 10 percent compared to the previous year. This rate of growth is the highest since 1978-1979. The annual percentage change more than doubled in five years from 4.7 percent in 2010 – 2011 to a record 10 percent in 2014 – 2015 academic year. This amounted to 4.8 percent of total student enrollment on American campuses. However, in terms of the ratio between international students and domestic students, 26 percent of all students in Australian public universities were international students (Marginson, 2009), making it the top destination for international students. In the total international student population in the U. S., 40.9 percent were enrolled in undergraduate study and 37.2 percent were enrolled in graduate study (IIE, 2015).

In the 2014-2015 academic year, the 974,926 international students who studied in the United States contributed \$30.5 billion and support for 373,381 jobs to the U. S. economy (NAFSA, 2015). The economic analysis for the 2013-2014 year shows that the contribution of international students to the U. S. economy was \$26.8 billion and creation or support of 340,000 jobs (NAFSA, n.d.). This indicates that for every seven international students enrolled, three U. S. jobs are supported or created in the sectors of higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance. In addition to the financial benefits, the students also bring academic and cultural values, such as internationalization of the curricula (Johnston, Baker, & Creedy, 1997), providing an international perspective to their academic unit, contributions in class discussions, and adding to domestic students’ overall learning experience

(Trice, 2003), to their campuses and communities. Other benefits of political and economic dimensions would include the fostering of international trade, diplomatic relationships, international friendships, and their economic contributions by engaging in tourism within the host country (Johnston, et al., 1997). Some externalities that are also perceived benefits of receiving international students is that the value of the educational qualifications offered by the institution is increased through international associations, leading to more marketable qualifications and higher demand for courses.

Organizational Reputation and Relational Satisfaction

Organizations are required to constantly address the needs of its internal and external publics like, employees, governments, communities, consumers, stockholders, and organized activists (Grunig, & Dozier, 2003). This has resulted in organization to be increasingly dependent on personnel who have the expertise to communicate and build relationships with the various stakeholder groups. This organizational dependency is often fulfilled using the expertise of the public relations profession. “The purpose of public relations is to help organizations build relationships with the publics found within several categories of stakeholders” (p. 2). When there are behavioral consequences between an organization and a group of people, the individual members become a public and engage in an organization–public relationship (Grunig, & Hunt, 1984; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Grunig & Huang, 2000). The relationships of an organization with its stakeholders are influenced by the organization’s reputation and changes in its reputation (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011). In a review of literature on organizational reputation Lange, et al. (2011) found themes that attempted to define organizational reputation as three different conceptualizations –

being known (generalized awareness or visibility of the firm; prominence of the firm in the collective perception), *being known for something* (perceived predictability of

organizational outcomes and behavior relevant to specific audience interests), and *generalized favorability* (perceptions or judgments of the overall organization as good, attractive, and appropriate). (p. 155)

There are indications that organizational reputation is related to positive outcomes like attracting customers and employees.

The unit of study in public relations should be the relationships between an organization and its publics; therefore, research on the practice of public relations should focus on these relationships (Ferguson, 1984). Positive effects of organization-public relationships have been demonstrated through the results of the IABC Excellence study (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Three aspects of organization-publics relationship are, (a) the quality of relationships affects reputation; (b) quality relationships and reputation result more from the behavior of organizations than from messages disseminated; and (c) the value of relationships includes the value of reputation.

A significant positive association was found to exist between positive organization-public relational outcomes and favorable reputation of the organization (Yang, 2007). In conceptualizing the value of public relations, concepts of organization–public relationships and organizational reputation can be intertwined, while favorable organizational reputation can be obtained by quality relationship management between an organization and its strategic publics. Yang (2007) also proposed the antecedents of relational outcomes and reputation as communication behaviors, familiarity, and personal experience.

Academic Advising and Satisfaction

The adjustment of international students to their host universities can occur in four different ways: a foreigner with special cultural learning problems, a student adjusting to the common stresses of a beginning student, a maturing person concerned about purposes, meaning, and goals, and a national representative sensitive about his/her national status and ethnic

background (Bochner, 1972). Although the percentage of satisfied students varied according to the different host countries, studies have found that satisfaction with non-academic or social aspects of the foreign students' experiences is generally lower than their satisfaction with academic or professional aspects (Church, 1982). Satisfaction is defined as pleasurable fulfillment which the consumer perceives when a consumption fulfills some need, desire, or goal (Oliver, 1997).

The population of international students is contributing to the diverse group of students that advisers are expected to counsel in universities (NACADA, n. d.). The obstacles that many international students face in U. S. campuses could be a challenge for advisers to address. Academic advising is "about building relationships with our students, locating places where they get disconnected, and helping them get reconnected" (Drake, 2011, p. 8). Students who have developed a relationship with a faculty member, academic adviser, or administrator to help them navigate the challenges in their academic and social life are academically more successful and happy (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Today, advising is a form of communication that involves information exchange between a student and an adviser to aid the student in the process of decision-making (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, 1984). Drake (2011) speculated that academic advising could provide the only instance where students have the opportunity to develop a personal and consistent relationship with an individual in the university.

In Museus and Ravello's (2010) study of minority students in predominantly White institutions, it emerged that "humanized" academic advising, defined as the adviser being caring and concerned about the students' personal experiences, as one aspect of ensuring student success. Often, the consistent connection and interaction with students has placed advisers in the role of students' main liaison with the university (Drake, 2011). In a student survey conducted at

a public university, it emerged that the human element was a critical part of advising (Gaines, 2014). Face-to-face communication was the preferred choice of communication for most of the survey respondents.

Based on different paradigms and theories of education quality and school effectiveness, world-wide education reforms for education are experiencing three “waves” that result in strategies and approaches in education quality assurance (Cheng, 2003). While the first wave focused on internal quality assurance, the second wave emphasized “interface quality assurance in terms of organizational effectiveness, stakeholders’ satisfaction and market competitiveness and makes an effort to ensure satisfaction and accountability to the internal and external stakeholders” (p. 202). Most often this quality assurance would refer to the efforts that are undertaken to ensure that the needs of the stakeholders are satisfied. The third wave that the current improvement initiatives should be moving towards is the emphasis on future quality assurance with regards to the new paradigm of education relating to contextualized multiple intelligences (CMI), globalization, localization, and individualization. The satisfaction model of quality assurance (Cheng & Tam, 1997) operationalizes education quality as the extent to which the performance of the institution satisfies the expectations of its most powerful stakeholders. Satisfaction was found to be positively affected by purchase behavior, repurchase intent, positive word-of mouth, customer retention and the continuous use of provided service (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

Students, including domestic and international, graduate and professional students, and mid-career level professionals seeking continuing education, are considered internal stakeholders of a university (Bartell, 2003). Students’ perception of quality of an educational experience is a result of student satisfaction (Athiyaman, 1997). Student satisfaction is multi-dimensional and

depended on the clarity of student goals (Hartman & Schmidt, 1995), and trust significantly influenced satisfaction (Grossman, 1999). Treating students in a consistent and equitable manner, meeting students' expectations, and handling student complaints in a caring manner, are some methods by which universities can build trust.

The web of interconnected experiences that overlap and influence student satisfaction are a large part of student life. A university's product is the sum of the student's academic, social, physical, and even spiritual experiences (Sevier, 1996). The likelihood of a student recommending the university to friends/relatives was highly influenced by the extent of interaction between the students and the university personnel, such as faculty and advisers (Browne, Kaldenberg, Browne, & Brown, 1998). There is an empirically demonstrated strong link between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Patterson, Johnson, & Spreng, 1997) and repurchase intentions (i.e., retention decisions) are based on the evaluation of multiple underlying service dimensions (Bolton, Kannan, & Bramlett, 2000). Therefore, the quality of interaction with university personnel is highly important for student satisfaction with the university.

Hong and Yang (2009) in their study found that organizational reputation and relational satisfaction are significant predictors of customers' positive word of mouth (WOM) intentions. Importantly, customer-company identification mediates the influence of organizational reputation on positive WOM intentions. The findings of this study suggested that, to promote customers' positive WOM intentions, companies needed to obtain a favorable reputation held by customers and cultivate a satisfactory relationship with customers, while fostering customer-company identification.

In a study on university alumni and their satisfaction with their alma mater, Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003) found that the prestige of the university and reciprocity were positively related to the respondent's level of satisfaction. The results of the study also suggested that encouraging students to be involved actively in school activities and maintaining or improving the level of university prestige will support the formation and strength of university identity, which will motivate students to engage in supportive behaviors in the future. University prestige was also found to directly and positively affect the likelihood of alumni promoting the university to others.

Word of Mouth Intentions

Word of mouth (WOM) occurs in real time and real life scenarios (Stern, 1994). It is referred to the

utterances that can be taken as the verbal acts of real persons on specific occasions in response to particular circumstances. These utterances are personally motivated, spontaneous, ephemeral, and informal in structure - that is, they are not paid for by a sponsor; they are not composed and revised over time; they disappear as soon as they are uttered; and they are not consciously structured by means of literary devices (imagery, rhythm, rhyme) or formal patterns (poetic, epic, and so forth). (p. 7)

In its broadest sense, any information about a target object that is transferred between individuals in person or via any other communication medium is known as WOM communication, while the basic idea is that information about products, services, stores, companies, and more can spread from one consumer to others (Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). Although WOM can be positive or negative, marketers are usually interested in positive WOM that includes recommendation to others. Satisfaction and trust have a significantly positive effect on WOM; therefore, WOM has to be aimed at increasing satisfaction and building a strong trust relationship (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003).

Positive word of mouth (WOM) intentions and behaviors are significantly influenced by satisfaction, commitment, and identification, with the effects of satisfaction and identification at least partially mediated through commitment (Brown, et al., 2005). The influence of satisfaction on positive WOM becomes less positive at higher levels of commitment to the marketing organization when there is an interaction between satisfaction and consumer commitment. The effect of positive WOM intentions is partially mediated by consumer commitment to the retailer. However, the overall level of satisfaction exerts less influence on positive WOM for consumers with higher levels of commitment to a relationship with the marketer. This contradicts research that suggests that increased customer commitment to the organization will increase the likelihood of favorable recommendations (De Matos & Rossi, 2008)

Study Purpose and Research Questions

International student enrollment at Ball State University (BSU) has also increased in the past several years. From a total enrollment of 687 on- and off-campus international students in the 2010-2011 academic year, the number grew to 801 in the 2014-2015 year (Ball State University, 2015a). Therefore, international students made up 3.88 percent of the entire student population at BSU in 2014-2015, compared to 3.11 percent in 2010-2011 (Ball State University, 2015b). This growth aligns toward the establishment of the international student population as one of the key publics of the university. Based on the literature reviewed, if positive relational outcomes are considered to have a favorable effect on the organization's image and positive WOM intentions, this study posited that the communication behaviors between international students and university personnel, as constructs of organization-public relationships, will create favorable outcomes on the university reputation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the communication patterns of international students with university personnel as

predictors of student satisfaction of the university and international graduate students' perceived university reputation, and provide recommendations for relationship building communications between international students and their advisers. The study was conducted to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the level of international students' satisfaction of communication with university advisers?

RQ2: What is the effect of the communication behavior between international students and university personnel on the students' satisfaction with the university?

RQ3: What is the effect of the communication behavior between international students and university personnel on the university reputation and the students' WOM intentions?

Based on the findings from this study, the researcher formulated a communications plan along with relevant recommendations to the Rinker Center for International Programs (RCIP), which houses the International Student Services office. The communications plan addressed different aspects like goals and objectives, identification of key publics, formulating strategies and tactics, and evaluation techniques.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

In order to measure relationships and reputation, these terms have to be operationalized into valid and acceptable variables. Yang (2007) proposed the antecedents of relational outcomes and reputation as communication behaviors, familiarity, and personal experience. Communication between two people not only involves the exchange of information, but also the “building, maintaining, or destroying a relationship between them” (Downs, & Adrian, 2012, p. 131). Therefore, to measure the relational outcomes and reputation, this study analyzed the communication behaviors of the participants with their university advisers.

Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods to answer the proposed research questions. The term “qualitative research” refers to “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 10-11). It is the “non-mathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into theoretical explanatory scheme” (p. 11). This method can be used to examine individual lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings. It can also be used to research organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations. In qualitative research, some of the data – particularly demographic characteristics – can be quantified, however, most of the research analysis is interpretative in nature. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011) have provided an evolving definition for qualitative research, their latest definition being:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world

visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that researchers aim for a holistic account by trying to develop a complex picture of the issue under study (Creswell, 2012). The larger picture that emerges can generally be arrived at by reporting multiple perspectives, and identifying the many factors involved in the situation. The focus is kept on learning the meanings that the participants perceive of the issue at hand and is not directed towards the researcher's or the literature authors' perceptions of the issue. Another characteristic of qualitative research is that complex reasoning is used through inductive and deductive logic. Researchers work back and forth between themes and the database until a comprehensive set of themes is assembled. These themes, patterns, and categories are arrived at from the "bottom up" by inductively organizing data into increasingly more abstract units of information. The research process of qualitative research is emergent. Therefore, the researcher may not be able to tightly prescribe the research plan and would have to change all or some phases of the plan after the commencement of data collection.

Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue is needed to be explored (Creswell, 2012). "This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or a population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices" (p. 47-48). Qualitative research is also conducted when there is a necessity to obtain complex, and detailed

understanding of the issue, which can only be accomplished by talking directly to the people directly concerned with the issue. “We conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 48).

Design of the Project

Data for qualitative research can be gathered through four different types: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2012). Data collection in this research was primarily carried out through the in-depth qualitative interviewing method. In this method, the researcher is looking for examples, and experiences from the participants that can provide rich and detailed information; the questions are open ended, without any specific answer choices or categories; the interviewer does not follow a strict set of questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). One of the basic qualitative interviewing methods is the focus group. This qualitative research method involves gathering a group of people to discuss a given topic of common interest in the presence of the researcher. The researcher would act as a facilitator to ensure that the discussion remains focused on the topic and elicit a wide range of opinions from the participants.

In order to ensure that the data in the study is robust with varied experiences, an inclusion and exclusion criteria was established. To be eligible to participate in this study, participants were required to be 18 years old or above, be currently enrolled as a full-time student in the graduate level, have studied at a US higher education institution for a minimum of one academic year, and must not be a citizen of the United States. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants for a focus group were recruited through an advertisement email sent to prospective research participants through the BSU Communication Center. There

were five respondents to the advertisement, however, this was less than the minimum number of participants required to participate in the focus group. Therefore, approval to modify the research design from focus groups to in-depth semi-structured interviews was received from the IRB (Appendix A). In addition to the five respondents of the previous protocol, two more respondents were recruited through a snowball sampling method.

Semi-structured interviews usually take place as a scheduled, and extended conversation between the researcher and the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In the semi-structured interview the researcher has a specific topic to learn about and has a set of questions, prepared in advance, that the participants would address. The researcher also plans to ask follow-up questions based on the participant's answers. The interviewee is encouraged to answer in length with vivid detail.

The study participants were interviewed on campus at Ball State University. Before the start of the interview the researcher explained the purpose and stipulations of the study to the participants, after which they were asked to provide their informed consent (see Appendix B). The participants were also asked to complete a questionnaire that collected demographic information, including their age, country of origin, number of years in the U. S., and their employment situation (see Appendix C). The questionnaire data were entered into an electronic document and the document was stored in the researcher's password protected computer. The paper copies of the questionnaire and the informed consent were stored in the researcher's locked cabinet. The interview followed a semi-structured interview guide that directed the issues under discussion (see Appendix D). Probes and follow-up questions were formulated, as and when required, in response to the answers provided by the participants.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The interviews lasted for a time duration from 20 minutes to 35 minutes. One of the seven participants in the study opted out of the research and hence the interview was stopped and the audio recording was destroyed. The audio from the remaining interviews were transcribed and stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. Any uniquely identifiable information in the transcriptions were removed and pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The audio recordings and transcriptions were stored in the researcher's password-protected computer. The data from the study will be destroyed after three years.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter begins with the information on the demographic data of the study participants followed by selected quotes from the participants pertaining to the research questions. Common themes that emerged from the interviews are reported later in the chapter.

Participants' Demographics

There were seven participants in the study, out of which six participants completed their interview. There were equal number of male and female participants – three each. Out of the six participants, three participants were between the ages of 25 years and 30 years, making up half the sample size. Two of the participants were over 30 years old and one was between the age of 18 years and 24 years. The mean age of the participants was 28.83 years.

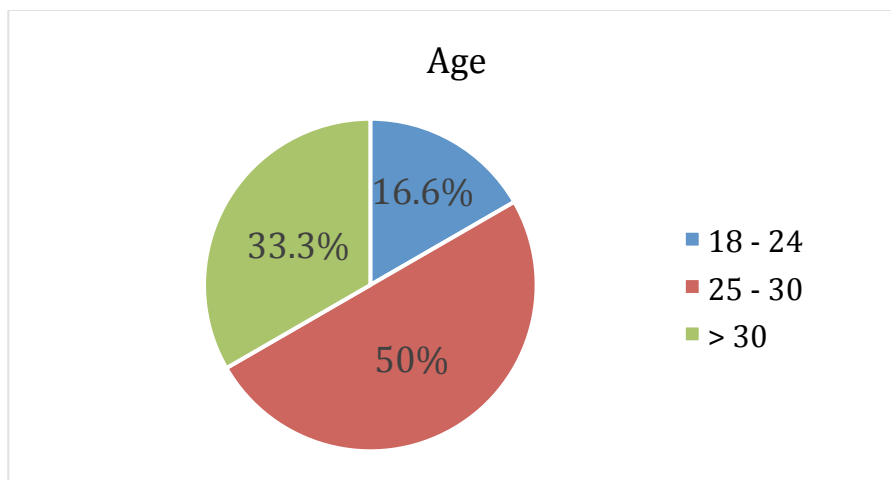


Figure 1: Age of the participants

Four of the participants were enrolled in master's programs and two were in doctoral programs. Ball State University was the only American university that two of the participants have attended. The other participants either graduated with a degree from or spent some time at another American campus. The participants hailed from countries like Saudi Arabia, and Iran, as

well as countries in Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. Due to the confidentiality of the participants' identity, further descriptions will not be reported in this study.

Three of the participants have spent more than five years in the U. S., while two of the participants have spent less than two years. One participant had been present in the U. S. for more than two years but less than five years. The combined total number of years all the participants had spent in the U. S. is close to 32 years; however, two of the participants made up more than 20 years of this combined total.

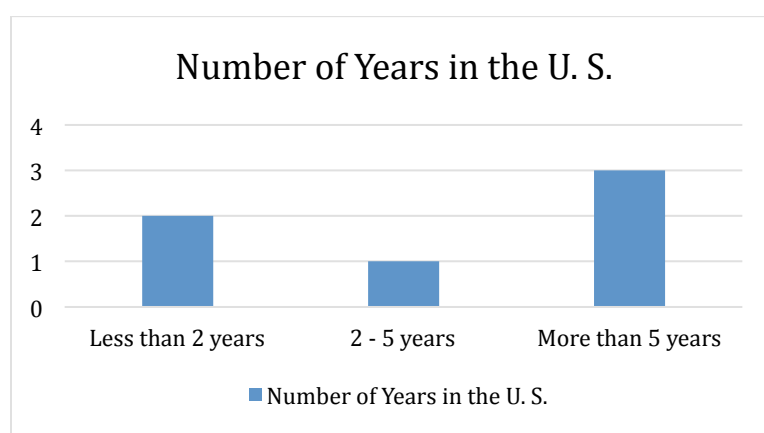


Figure 2: Number of years spent in the U. S. by participants

With the exception of two participants, most of the time spent in the U. S. by the other participants was at Ball State University. Four of the six participants had spent less than two years studying at BSU. One participant had spent 2 – 5 years and another, five years at BSU.

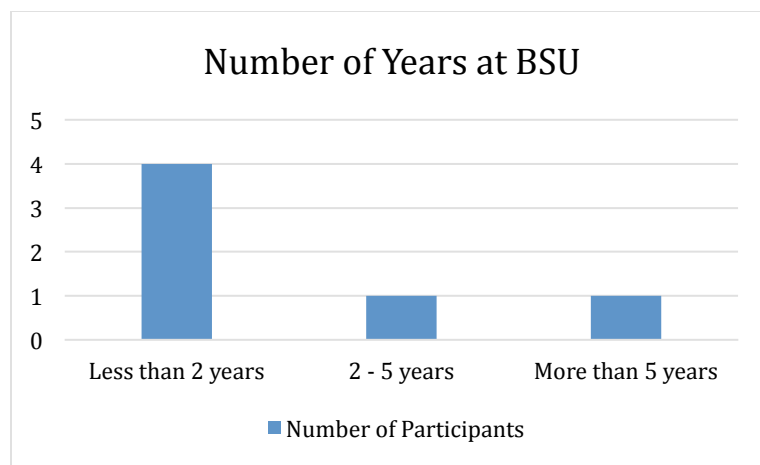


Figure 3: Number of years spent at BSU by participants

Four of the six participants had graduate assistantships at the university, one participant held a teaching assistantship, and one did not have any on-campus job.

Research Questions

The participants were asked to report the communication experiences they had with their academic adviser, or capstone project supervisor, or graduate assistantship supervisor, depending on who among the three they communicated with the most. All the three roles are referred to as “adviser” in the results. An interview discussion guide, provided in Appendix B, with a list of nine questions was used to interview the study participants. Question six had seven sub-questions. Follow-up questions and probes were used to gauge more detailed information from the participants. To ensure confidentiality, the names of participants have been changed in this section.

Satisfaction with communication

The study participants were asked whether they were satisfied with the communication associated with their adviser (Question 4), if they would change anything about their communication (Question 5), and whether they were satisfied with several specific attributes of their adviser (Question 6). When asked “How satisfied are you with the communication with

your adviser?” five of the six participants answered that they were extremely satisfied with the communication associated with their adviser and one of them was only somewhat satisfied. All the participants attributed their satisfaction to the quality and nature of their interactions with their advisers. Some participants who were satisfied with the communication expressed that their adviser exhibits a sense of concern towards them.

Zahra found that communicating with her adviser is easier than she expected when she first arrived in the U. S.:

I wondered if I could communicate with other people. And usually the problem that we have is we start using this language as our everyday language. Sometimes I just want to convey what I want to say and you have to use it in real time. Because polite sentence has more complicated structure and I always worry that I unintentionally be impolite [sic]. He [My adviser] is very patient; he is very open-minded towards international students.

Marie explained that part of her satisfaction with the communication with her adviser is due to the nature of the work that she is expected to accomplish. She said, “She lets me know what she needs me to get done and any question regarding the execution of whatever task it may be or the deadline it has to be done with, I then seek out her feedback on that.”

Clement attributed his satisfaction to the interest that his adviser takes in his overall well-being. He said, “I am very satisfied because beyond being an adviser, he is also a mentor who not only cares about my professional or academic [life] but also my whole person.”

On the other hand, Jeanne’s satisfaction was spurred by her adviser’s ability to empathize with Jeanne’s academic hardships and difficulties.

Aziz, who was only somewhat satisfied with the communications associated with his adviser expressed that it was due to his expectations not being met. “I thought my adviser will give me the perfect advice but then I found out that is not the case”, he said. He perceived that his adviser does not care about his academic progress and failed to provide enough information in their communications. However, Aziz did not place the blame solely on his adviser. He said

“She does her job. She tried.” He also tended to be negatively critical about his communication habits. “I have to be smarter. I try to blame myself because finally, I mean, it’s my job to learn. This is grad school.” Similar to Aziz, Zahra also said that she would attribute any negative aspects of the communication to herself. When asked if she would change anything about the communication between her and her adviser, she said, “Nothing. Maybe my English.” Marcel’s opinions were also along the same lines. He was very satisfied with his adviser and said that he would attribute any dissatisfaction to his own shortcomings.

Satisfaction with the university

The participants were asked if they were satisfied with Ball State University (Question 7) and were probed on the reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. All the participants mentioned that they had overall satisfaction with the university but also mentioned that there were some aspects about the university that they wished were different.

Zahra and Marie wished that Ball State and the local area, in general would be more diverse. Zahra said, “If I were to get my Ph.D., I would choose a university that is more diverse.” Marie also said that the university needed to ensure that international students are provided more support in launching their careers. “One thing [I would change is the], overall support for international students. This is a launch pad for our career. So I feel there are not a lot of support services for international students to build their career”, she said.

Similar to Marie, Clement also said that he was not satisfied with the support provided to international students:

I am a Ph.D. student and as a Ph.D. researcher I have to seek my own grant because doing research as a Ph.D. student, and especially scientific research costs a lot of money. So I have to apply for a lot of grants to support my research, my lab analysis. And I feel Ball State is really not very supportive, I have submitted a lot of grant [applications] to a lot of external organizations and I received scholarship. But I never received any scholarship from Ball State. I think Ball State really does not care about me as a

researcher. Second, as an international student I feel I should have much more support in that area because I don't have the same facilities that American students have. Just because some scholarships are restrictive. For that reason I feel Ball State should be much more supportive to international students working at my level.

Jeanne compared her experiences between Ball State University and her undergraduate university. She said that she was satisfied with the university now but was not satisfied when she arrived at Ball State for the first time:

Right now, yes. But in my first semester, no. I had a terrible experience with international admissions through the Rinker Center. I did not know I was accepted at Ball State until I showed up at the Rinker Center in the student center because I wasn't positive. I knew. But I never received an acceptance letter. I received this kinda crappy email in this weird formatting that just looked like a random email. It looked like spam. They were rude. The orientation was crap. There was no socialization. And where I did my undergrad, orientation was just a fun, there were fun activities. You would meet other international students. It was nothing like that at all [at Ball State]. So I came here and did not want to be here at all. If I hadn't been offered money [Graduate Assistantship] I would have been out there.

Aziz, who was not satisfied with the communication with his adviser, was very satisfied with the university. He attributed some of his satisfaction with the university to its reputation among his colleagues in his country:

Ball State University is very famous among my colleagues in my country, in my college. When I told them that I got acceptance at Ball State, they told me, "Oh, it's very well known. That professor, and that professor, and that professor, graduated from it".

Aziz was also enthusiastic about the locale, ambience, ecology and architecture of the university.

Students' WOM intentions

Most of the participants were not enthusiastic about recommending Ball State to individuals in their home country. Marie said that she would recommend BSU along with a disclaimer that international students don't receive much support. Jeanne and Zahra said that they would not recommend BSU to individuals in their home country. Jeanne was more likely to recommend her undergraduate university over BSU:

I probably wouldn't. Well, it depends. You know it all depends on the students. I wouldn't recommend Ball State over my undergrad university. Just for maybe, higher academic expectations, [and] the environment. I don't think Ball State is bad. I think there is better.

On the reputation of the university Jeanne said, "It's a small school. It's pretty easy to get in, especially for international students. It's fine. But it's not top-notch."

Zahra also cited the availability of better education quality in other universities as a reason she would not recommend the university to others:

It depends on who asks me. It's not the best place for education, to be honest. If they have the chance to go to a better university I [would] recommend [them] to go there. But we can start here. Get a master's degree and apply for Ph.D. [elsewhere]. That increase[s] our chance to get into that university, compared to when you apply to those universities from back home.

Although he has not been to other universities, Aziz said that he would still recommend BSU to individuals in his country. "I would. I haven't tried other universities. This is the only university I have been to. I would still recommend it", he said.

The admission process and the interactions with faculty influenced Clement's WOM intentions:

Yes, definitely, I would recommend Ball State. The admission process is not that hard compared to other universities and there are a lot of opportunities in terms of assistantship, especially for international students because they need the aid to survive. The proximity with the professors is awesome. It is easy to meet faculty and professors directly. In terms of relationship with the faculty, it is a good university.

Although Marcel also mentioned that he would recommend the university to individuals in his home country, he had a different approach to his WOM intentions. He laid the onus on the reputation of the individuals in his country:

I would not recommend Ball State to just anyone in my country. I would recommend it to individuals who are hardworking and responsible because I don't want just anyone to come here and spoil the reputation of my country. I have worked hard to build it up.

Implications

The tendency of respondents to quickly blame their own difficulties with the English language indicated satisfaction with their adviser. The respondents who perceived that the attempts made by their advisers in understanding their needs as a demonstrated concern for the students' well being contributed to their satisfaction of the advising experience. However, it was found that the respondents' satisfaction with their advising experiences was independent of their experience with other services provided by the university. For example, despite being very satisfied with his adviser, who is also the research supervisor, Clement expressed dissatisfaction with the university's attitude toward his research endeavors. Although his adviser is closely related to his research, the experiences with his adviser seem to have been independent of his experiences with other aspects of his research process. In the case of Aziz, it was noted that although he was dissatisfied with his advising experience, it had no impact on his satisfaction with the university. The reputation of the university among his colleagues in his home country had influenced Aziz's perception of the university's reputation. This also demonstrated that Alumni in overseas institutions have the ability to make a strong impact on the perceptions of prospective students.

Another variable that could have affected the respondents' satisfaction with the university is the length of time the students had spent at other universities before enrolling at their current university. This provided respondents the ability to compare their experiences between the two institutions and differentiate the quality of services provided at each. In contrast, only one respondent who had not been to any other higher education institution in the U. S. made comparisons with other universities. Some of the dissatisfactions that the respondents expressed did not impact their WOM intentions, since most of the respondents expressed positive WOM

intentions. Some of the reasons cited for their positive WOM intentions were ease of admission process, ability to obtain financial aid, location of the university, and the ability to interact with the faculty with ease. Most students cited email as the most used, as well as preferred, mode of interaction with their adviser or graduate assistantship supervisor, at the same time, some of them also mentioned that they would prefer face-to-face communication with other services provided by the university, like career center, library, and international center services.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the study on the international graduate student – adviser interactions and its influence on the students’ satisfaction of the university and word of mouth intentions. An analysis revealed that participants who perceived that their expectations from their adviser are met are satisfied with the communication. Five of the six participants were satisfied with the communication with their adviser, while one participant was not. Participants who perceived that their adviser had expressed concern over their academic well being were more satisfied than those who did not discuss their academic related problems with their adviser. It was also noted that one participant was not satisfied with the communication with his adviser when his expectations were not. However, this did not influence his overall satisfaction of the university. The reputation of the university was found to have an effect on the WOM intentions of the participants. Participants who believed that other universities had better education quality were unlikely to recommend BSU to individuals in their home country.

CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

The researcher investigated the communication behaviors of international graduate students with their academic advisers, graduate assistantship supervisors, and thesis advisers. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with international students who had at least one year of academic experience at an American university. From the analysis of the qualitative interviews it was evident that the students' experiences with their advisers are independent of their experiences with the other services provided in the university. It was also found that their satisfaction of the interactions with their advisers has little effect on the overall satisfaction and perception of the university and its reputation. Some students reported high satisfaction with their adviser; however, at the same time, their perception of the university's reputation and word of mouth (WOM) intentions were not positive. Therefore, the satisfaction experienced with their adviser has to be leveraged to create positive WOM intentions and satisfaction with the university. Other areas that can be improved to increase satisfaction are international student orientation, and career services. In order to ensure steady progress in improving services for international students, thereby increasing the reputation of the university and WOM intentions of the students, effective relationship building communications have to be improved. Recommendations that universities can adopt to achieve this are provided. Elements of these recommendations are based on the findings from the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The recommendations for communication effectiveness provided here follow a three-pronged approach. First, a new role that can be housed in the international programs office is suggested. The role would be responsible for providing communications related resources and support to university personnel in interacting with international students. Regardless if this role can be created and filled, further training for advisers is also suggested. This training module

could be shared with faculty who would be interacting with international students on a regular basis, most particularly their academic advisers. The final approach is a communications plan that would attempt to alleviate some of the reasons the participants cited as contributing to their dissatisfaction or negative perception of the university.

International Student Communications Specialist

Higher education institutions are recommended to create a specialized role in order to aid advisers in fostering relationship-building communications. Since the academic advisers or graduate assistantship supervisors are most often faculty involved in research projects and teaching duties or academic professionals with a heavy workload, they may not be able to devote time to customize their advising style to international students or actively seek information on resources that would aid these students' academic and professional pursuits. Therefore, an International Student Communications Specialist role that can provide advisers with the right resources and information has to be created to increase the effectiveness of the communications.

Job Title: International Student Communications Specialist

Job Status: Full Time, Regular

Department: International Student Center

Job Description: This position will serve as a member of the international student academic engagement team and play a key role in planning, designing, implementing, reviewing, and assessing a communications plan that promotes and enhances the University's brand. This individual will provide guidance, resources, and support to academic advisers and graduate assistantship supervisors in communicating with their international students. This will include gathering information on key resources available at the university, developing informational guides as print and online publications using different multimedia platforms, developing and distributing email newsletters for students and faculty, formulating talking points for advisers to discuss with their students, liaising with various departments in the university to collaborate and plan events tailored for international students, and develop messaging to increase the university's reputation among its international students.

Job Responsibilities:

- Serve as the primary marketing and communications strategist for the international programs office
- Create and execute strategic plans for increasing the satisfaction of current international students with the university
- Create and maintain professional relationship with other departments in the university, such as the career center, university libraries, sponsored programs office, counseling center, housing, etc.

- Organize workshops and events in collaboration with these departments, producing international students focused content
- Provide support to faculty and academic professionals in building relationships with their international advisees
- Create awareness among faculty and academic professionals about international students' needs and expectations from their advisers
- Conduct training workshops on communicating with international students for university personnel

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in strategic communications, journalism, public relations, marketing, or related field
- Two years of experience working with international students
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Show initiative and ability to manage time, prioritize multiple and concurrent tasks
- Ability to creatively approach challenges and projects and to work effectively
- Strong planning and organizational skills
- Knowledge of publications software and email marketing tools
- Experience working with a diverse group
- Previous experience working in marketing or internal communications
- Ability to learn quickly, conduct evaluations, and assess feedback

Smaller institutions and universities that do not have a sizable number of international students may lack the funds to accommodate the above role in their organization. In some universities the international academic adviser or the international student services specialist would be addressing some of the responsibilities listed above. In any case, the following training can be provided to the faculty who interact with international students regularly.

Training Module for Advisers

The following training module is a tool to prepare university personnel for advising international students. It is recommended that all faculty who teach or advise international students undergo this training.

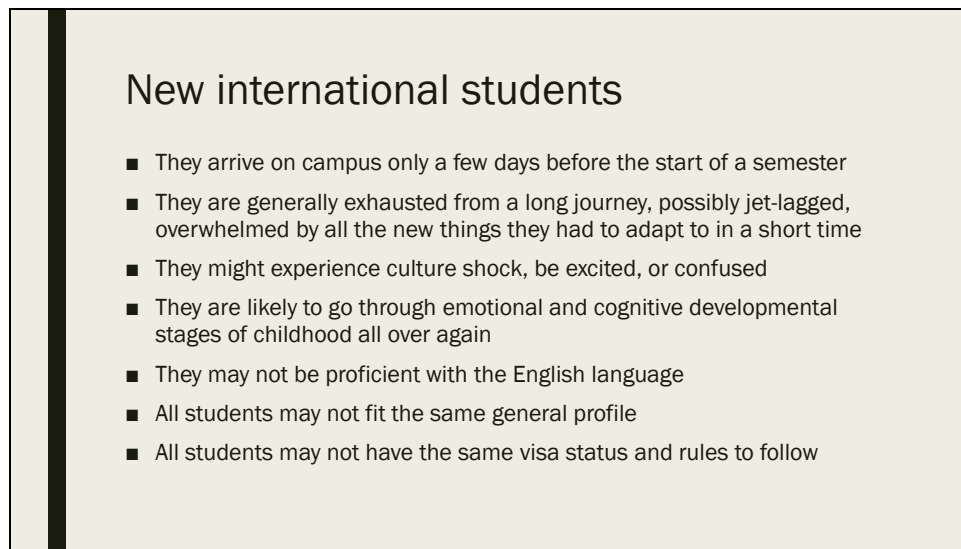
This training module is designed for faculty advising international students. The recommended time to deliver the presentation is 45 minutes. The presentation contains information on international students, general guidelines for advising them, and a few application oriented exercises. It is recommended that information from the presentation be given to the audience in the form of a guide or booklet that facilitates easy note-taking.

The PowerPoint file for this training module can be obtained by contacting the principal investigator.

Slide 1

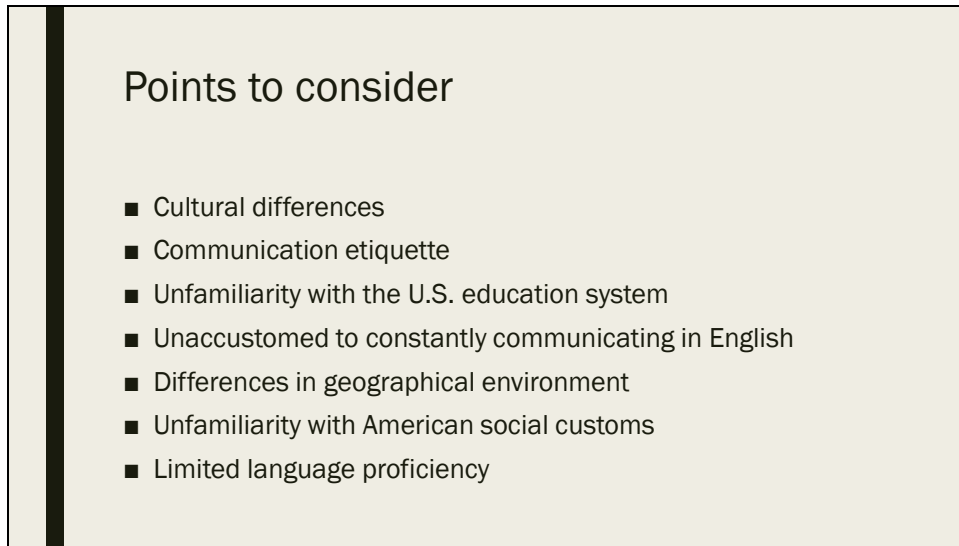


Slide 2



International students may not only be new to the university but also to the country. They might be going through a range of emotions. Each international student may be different from the others. Most students have to be advised on a case-by-case basis.

Slide 3

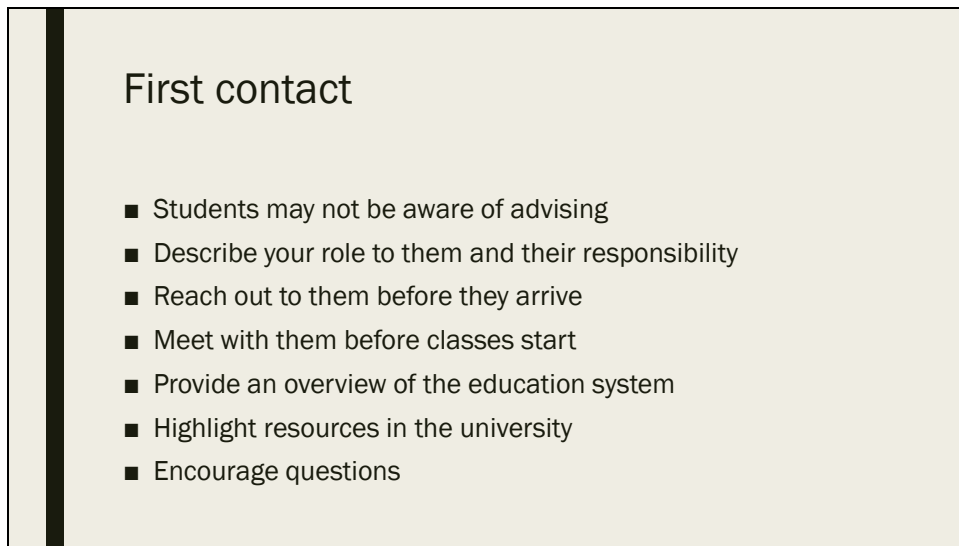
A presentation slide with a light beige background and a black border. On the left side, there is a vertical black bar. The title "Points to consider" is centered at the top in a black sans-serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of seven items, each preceded by a small black square.

Points to consider

- Cultural differences
- Communication etiquette
- Unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system
- Unaccustomed to constantly communicating in English
- Differences in geographical environment
- Unfamiliarity with American social customs
- Limited language proficiency

Some cultural differences might be obvious while others can be identified over time. Depending on the cultural background of the student the professional etiquette, demeanor, interpersonal communication, and English language proficiency may differ. Gaining a basic understanding of the student's cultural background will be very helpful in advising him/her.

Slide 4

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First contact

- Students may not be aware of advising
- Describe your role to them and their responsibility
- Reach out to them before they arrive
- Meet with them before classes start
- Provide an overview of the education system
- Highlight resources in the university
- Encourage questions

Academic advising may not be part of the educational system in the students' home countries. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure the student is aware of it and understands it. If possible, reach out to the students before they arrive on-campus and schedule time to meet them in your office. Ask a lot of questions to understand the student's situation. Highlight some of the

resources that the university provides according to the class standing of the student. For example, graduate students can be introduced to library and research resources, while undergraduates are introduced to student life.

Slide 5

Understanding differences

- Registering for courses
- Academic conventions
- Example: Grading conventions in Sri Lanka with their U.S. equivalents

<u>Marks</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>US Grade Comparison</u>
75 -100	<i>Distinction</i>	A +
60 – 74%	<i>First Class/Division</i>	A
50 – 59%	<i>Second Class/Division</i>	B
35 – 49%	<i>Pass</i>	C

Source: Online Guide to Educational Systems Around the World

In many foreign education systems a student might be automatically enrolled in classes based on their major and academic standing. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that the student understands the concept of registering for their classes. The student might also need assistance in understanding academic conventions with regard to the grading system. Utilize useful resources to your advantage in understanding these differences

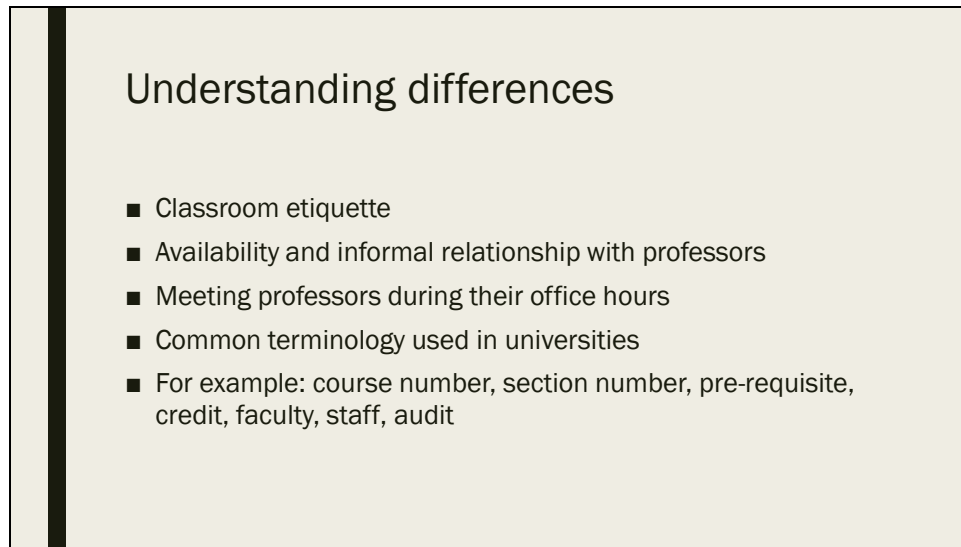
Slide 6

Understanding differences

- Educate the students on academic integrity standards
- Perceptions on plagiarism differ by culture
- The pressure to perform well and differing perceptions of plagiarism may not work well for the student
- Share the definition of plagiarism in the U.S. and its consequences
- Similarly the definition of academic probation differ by culture

The definition of these issues might be culturally dependent. Each student would have different needs. It is advisable to have information on resources that the student can utilize.

Slide 7

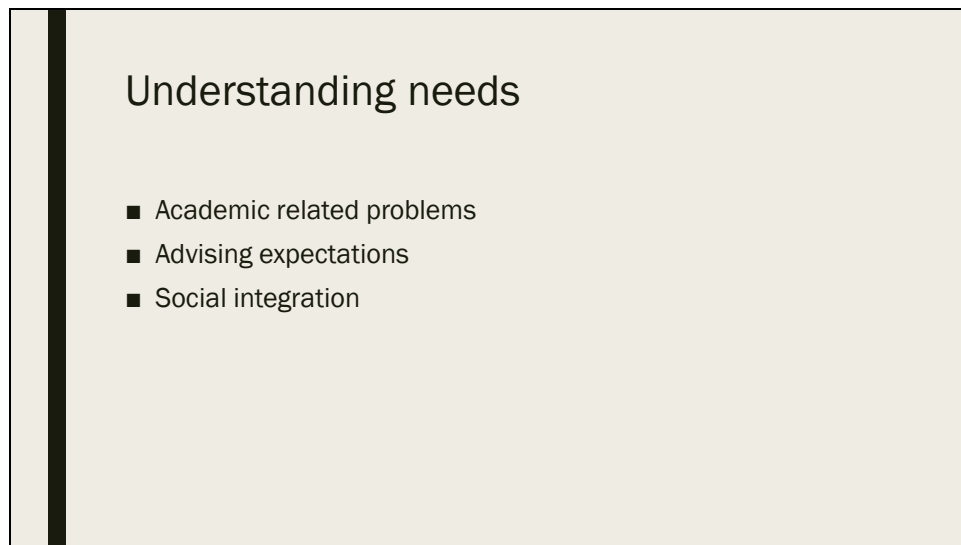
A presentation slide with a light beige background and a dark vertical bar on the left. The title "Understanding differences" is centered at the top. Below it is a bulleted list of five items.

Understanding differences

- Classroom etiquette
- Availability and informal relationship with professors
- Meeting professors during their office hours
- Common terminology used in universities
- For example: course number, section number, pre-requisite, credit, faculty, staff, audit

Talk about classroom etiquette in the U.S., including the informality of the relationship with professors, active participation in discussions, and meeting with professors to ask questions during their office hours.

Slide 8

A presentation slide with a light beige background and a dark vertical bar on the left. The title "Understanding needs" is centered at the top. Below it is a bulleted list of three items.

Understanding needs

- Academic related problems
- Advising expectations
- Social integration

Encourage the student to discuss academic related problems with you and provide resources to counter them. Understand the student's expectations and discuss how they can or can be met.

Demonstrated concern for the student's overall well-being is highly likely to affect their satisfaction with advising.

Slide 9

Advising Styles (Crookston, 1994): Prescriptive vs. Developmental

<p>Prescriptive Advising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The relationship is based on authority ■ Adviser “teaches” and the student “learns” ■ Student has the problem and adviser provides the solutions ■ “Student views himself as going to an authority figure with a problem and getting the answer” (p. 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “Academic adviser and the student differentially engage in a series of developmental tasks, the successful completion of which results in varying degrees of learning by both parties.” (p. 6) ■ “Reaching an agreement on who takes the initiative, who takes responsibility, who supplies knowledge and skill and how they are obtained and applied.” (p. 6)
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Crookston, B. B. (1994). Classics revisited: A developmental view of academic advising as teaching. *NACADA Journal*, 14(2), 5. Retrieved from <http://www.nacadajournal.org/doi/pdf/10.12930/0271-9517-29.1.78>

Slide 10

Advising style

- International students may be familiar with prescriptive style
- Advising style can differ based on class standing
- Focus on integrating them with domestic students
- Prescriptive style can be followed initially
- Eventually developmental style can be adopted
- Refer them to on-campus support services and resources
- Encourage students to be involved and participate in student life

International students may be familiar with prescriptive style of advising and may need it initially in their new academic environment. It is recommended that the adviser assesses the student's competitiveness and ability to adapt to the system and move towards developmental style of advising. It is also necessary that the adviser is familiar with the support services offered to students in the university and encourage international students to utilize these services. For example, career center services, library resources, professional development programs.

Slide 11

Communication tips

- Listen carefully and patiently
- Ask questions
- Be clear in your communications
- Limit the use of colloquial terms or explain the cultural usage of such terms
- Check for the student's understanding
- Be curious about the student's background
- Don't generalize

Most students who are not very fluent in English are conscious of their shortcomings and are very critical of their English language skills. Listening to them carefully and patiently would convey encouragement. Asking questions and showing interest in learning about the student's experiences contribute to the student's perceptions of the quality of advising.

Slide 12

WWYD: What would you do?

Case study 1

Ken is a communication studies student from Hong Kong. He was sponsored by his university in his home country to get a master's degree in international communication. In Ken's culture, a top GPA score is highly valued. Since Ken had trouble adjusting to the education system in the U.S. he could not perform as well as he expected to in his classes. At the end of his first semester he had a GPA of 3.0 and was not very thrilled about it. He sought his adviser's help in choosing classes that could potentially help him increase his GPA. Ken's adviser knew that Ken worked hard in his first semester and suggested courses that could advance his knowledge in the field. However, Ken was not very confident about his ability to excel in those course options. He is now mulling over taking a Chinese language course, which he is sure he will ace because he is very familiar with the language.

Read the scenario and discuss what would be the best plan of action in advising this student.

Slide 13

WWYD: What would you do? Case study 2

Irene is a graduate student in a MBA program. She is very passionate about economics and wants to become a successful business woman in the future. She wants to work in an internship over the summer break. However, as an international student she has been having trouble finding internships. She feels her adviser doesn't care and the university does not do anything for her professional development.

How can the adviser reassure this student about the university's concern for her overall development?

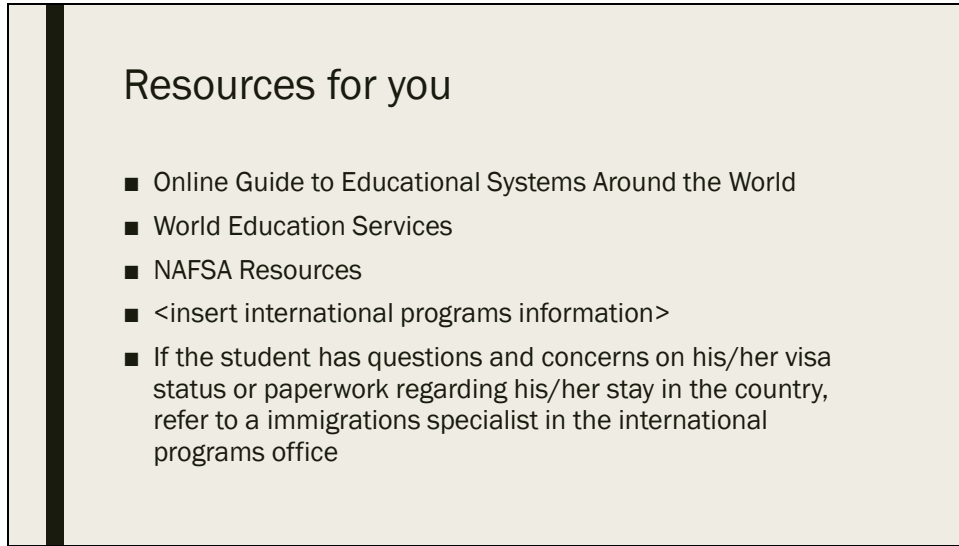
Slide 14

Resources for students

- International student services
- Library resources
- Career center
- Counseling center
- Office of student life
- Help with technology
- Housing

<Insert information on services available for students at your university here>

Slide 14

A presentation slide with a light beige background and a black border. On the left side, there is a vertical black bar. The title "Resources for you" is centered at the top in a black sans-serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of five items, each preceded by a small black square bullet point. The list includes links to educational resources and a note about visa status.

Resources for you

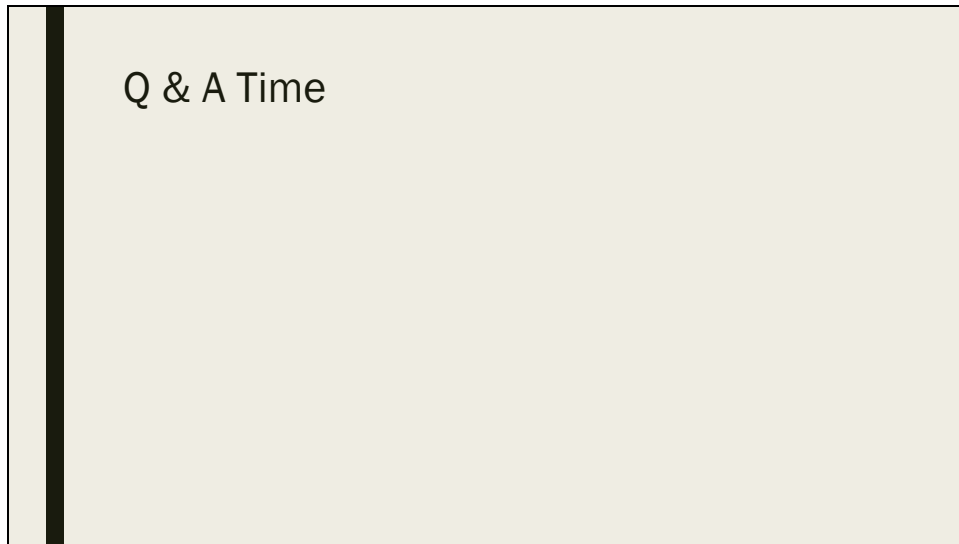
- Online Guide to Educational Systems Around the World
- World Education Services
- NAFSA Resources
- <insert international programs information>
- If the student has questions and concerns on his/her visa status or paperwork regarding his/her stay in the country, refer to a immigrations specialist in the international programs office

Online Guide to Educational Systems Around the World:

http://www.nafsa.org/Resource_Library_Assets/Publications_Library/Online_Guide_to_Educational_Systems_Around_the_World/

World Education Services: <http://www.wes.org/educators/index.asp?>

Slide 15

A presentation slide with a light beige background and a black border. On the left side, there is a vertical black bar. The title "Q & A Time" is centered at the top in a black sans-serif font.

Q & A Time

Relationship Building Communications Plan

This is a suggested relationship building communications plan for a mid-sized research universities looking to leverage their current international graduate students as potential marketers of the university to other prospective international students in their home country. The findings from semi-structured in-depth interviews of international graduate students suggested that international students have similar needs as American students, but also require that the services they receive from the university are customized to address issues faced by international students. Some of the areas that were reported as factors that would influence the students' satisfaction with the university are career support, new student orientation, quality of education, and financial aid for research projects. Since the students were found to have high satisfaction with their academic advisers or graduate assistantship supervisors but at the same time were dissatisfied with services not associated with their academic departments, this plan would aim to communicate information about support services through the students' advisers. The overall aim of this plan is to build the international student-adviser relationships in order to positively influence the university's reputation among its international students public.

Strategic Approach

The principle method to implement this plan will be interpersonal communication and relationship building between the student and his/her adviser through direct contact, augmented by customized support services provided by different entities in the university. This approach would require advisers to directly contact members of the target audience and establish preferred contact channels. Targeted email messages with information on support services would then be sent to the audience on a regular basis. The advisers will be provided with guidelines for relationship-building communications and support from the international programs office will be available to them. Additional partners can be recruited temporarily, as and when required.

Messaging Themes

Since most international students are still learning the English language, all messaging for relationship-building communications should be framed clearly and concisely, using simple sentences. The students could feel unwelcome if the language used in the communications is formalized and strictly professional. A friendly vibe to the messages would help facilitate interaction and increase the response rate. Therefore, the themes would reflect:

- We care about your study abroad experience with us
- Us and you make a good team
- It's not just an institution but a conglomeration of ideas and experiences
- Have a question? We can answer!

Best Practices in Research

While some resources would undergo only occasional modifications, changes in the contacts within the university, turnover of students, and evolving trends in the field have to be regularly followed and updated. One way to stay abreast with the changes is to ensure that records of resources available to international students are up to date. Identifying and

maintaining a database of advisers having international advisees would enable efficient dissemination of information and distribution of e-mail newsletters. The record must include primary contact information, address, and position of the advisers. Identifying their preferred mode of communication would be an advantage.

When communicating with international students, identify geographical origins of the target audience in order to ensure cultural sensitivity in the key messages sent to them. Recognize common information seeking behaviors of the target audience through informal or formal research methods. Gather data on audience's academic engagement and communications behavior, including preferred channels of interactions. Keep up with best practices in communicating with a diverse and evolving audience.

Target Publics

All international students enrolled in the university as on-campus students would be the target public. Based on specific programs, the audience can vary according to class standing, and country of origin.

General Timeline

This communications plan can be started at any point in the student's academic career at the university. Ideally, it should commence as soon as the student first arrives at the university.

Goal

Create awareness and positive reputation of university services provided to international students, thereby increase satisfaction with the university.

Objectives

1. Increase awareness of the university's student resources by the end of the advisee's first semester in the university
2. Have an effect on the satisfaction and create a positive attitude towards the university by the end of advisees' first semester.

Strategies and Tactics

Objective 1

Increase awareness of the university's student resources by the end of the advisee's first semester in the university

- 1.1 Develop a integrated orientation-campus tour to improve awareness about student services in the university
 - 1.1.1 Library tour with a workshop on how to access resources
 - 1.1.2 Recreation facilities and health center tour along with a one-hour "experience recreation" time
 - 1.1.3 Meet and greet with career center professionals

- 1.1.4 Provide guides and handouts with visual information at the orientation sessions.
 - 1.2 Sustain the initial awareness that is created throughout the semester
 - 1.2.1 Informational posters in dorms and residence areas of target audience
 - 1.2.2 Monthly e-mail newsletter
 - 1.2.3 Send e-mail updates about opportunities and events at the university
 - 1.3 Create academic and social events to facilitate interaction
 - 1.3.1 Run two social media contests every month to encourage interaction
 - 1.3.2 Provide incentives for participation in academic and student life
- Messages: The university is student-friendly, recognizes student needs, and provides a lot of useful resources to support students' academic and professional developments.

Objective 2

Have an effect on the satisfaction and create a positive attitude towards the university by the end of advisees' first semester.

- 2.1 Highlight achievements of faculty and students at the university, as well as educational rankings attained by the university
 - 2.1.1 Invite faculty and students to contribute to the monthly newsletter
 - 2.1.2 Highlight positive achievements of the university in the newsletter
 - 2.1.3 Share news positive news stories on the international programs' social media pages
- 2.2 Provide forums for sharing experiences and feedback
 - 2.2.1 Create an event at the end of the semester for international students to discuss their experiences, problems encountered, and how they solved it
 - 2.2.2 Place a suggestion box at the international programs office where students can drop-in their ideas for improvement
 - 2.2.3 Create a peer mentoring program where an upper class international student can mentor a new student

Evaluation

Develop and implement surveys to be administered at the end of each event in order to gather feedback and assess the impact of each type of programming. As data gathered from several programs accumulate, the impact of various programs can be assessed. The most successful tactics can be identified and implemented again. Conduct research on the following areas and compare results from previous semesters:

- a. Research students' information seeking behaviors.
- b. Participation numbers.
- c. Response rate for direct communication.
- d. Communication audit survey at the end of the semester.
- e. Retention of international students
- f. Post-graduate study of student satisfaction

Future Research

The above recommendations are based on a qualitative study of the international students at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Institutions that are reputed centers of academic excellence are known to attract an increased number of international students (Kehm, 2005). Some of the respondents in this study also pointed out that there are better institutions in terms of academic quality that students can consider in their choice of overseas institutions. This aspect has to be noted when universities define their strategic plan. The responsibility to attract top talent from across the world cannot be solely placed on the international admissions department alone since many other entities are either directly or indirectly involved.

Since interpersonal communication involves two parties, evaluating the experiences of faculty and academic professionals who advise international students would be a valuable addition to this topic. Carrying out a full-fledged communications audit of international students in the university, making use of quantitative research methods, would be useful in identifying other problem areas that may not have surfaced in qualitative research. Quantitative measurements would also enable a greater sample size and produce statistically significant results.

Outside Reviews of the Project

Evaluator's name

Roger D. Wessel, Ph.D.

Professor of Higher Education

Department of Educational Studies

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

Brief discussion of evaluator's credentials (e.g., knowledge and experience of the subject area)

My area of teaching and research revolves around the experiences of undergraduate students in American higher education. I direct a Master of Arts in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education; the outcome of this major is to prepare graduate students for entry-level jobs in academic and student support service offices, much like the International Student Office that the student referred to.

Relationship to the student and subject matter

The author was a student in my EDHI 601, College Student Development course in the fall of 2015.

Evaluation of the topic as appropriate for the creative endeavor

The intent of the topic and approach has an applied nature to it, investigating the communication behaviors of international graduate students with their academic advisers, graduate assistantship supervisors, and thesis advisers. This topic fits nicely in the applied nature of creative projects.

Evaluation of the student's approach

The student's approach was a qualitative study employing semi-structured in-depth interviews with international students who had at least one year of academic experience at an American university. The approach employed is reasonable.

Evaluation of the body of the project a) Quality b) Depth of treatment c) Coverage

In the 16 pages of content that I was able to read, the author provided a set of three recommendations for effective communication by student support staff (e.g., advisors) with international students. The student suggested three recommendations to achieve the intended outcome.

1. The creation of an international student communication specialist position within the office of the International Student Center. The author provided a job description, job responsibilities, and qualifications.
2. A training module for advisors was provided. This portion of the project stood out to me. She provided a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation that contains information on international students, general guidelines for advising them, and a few application oriented exercises. This was highly practical and an excellent learning experience for advisors. In addition to providing highly reliable information for the advisors, the presentation was grounded in the related literature and employed two case studies. Excellent work! I can see this being highly valuable to an advising office.
3. The third component consisted of a communication plan for building relationships with international students. I appreciated the intent of the author to state the obvious – the service must intentionally engage with international students. The student provided strategy, messaging themes, best practices, target publics, timeline, specific goals, and a

plan to evaluate the communications plan. This communication plan could easily be reviewed and adapted as needed so that it could be implemented.

Evaluation of the student's work as contributing to the field (e.g., body of knowledge)

I suggest that the author submit the project to an applied communication or advising journal as the topic is relevant to professionals in those settings. If the journal has an applied section, or section that publishes practice briefs or best practices, the manuscript may be considered. I would also suggest that the author consider submitting a conference proposal to a regional or national professional association that addresses the topic.

Evaluator's name

Dr. Laurie K. Cox, Director, International Student Services, Ball State University.

Brief discussion of evaluator's credentials (e.g., knowledge and experience of the subject area)

I have worked in the field of international education for 22 years out of out of a total of 29 years in the field of higher education. I worked at the University of Southern California (USC) for 12 years at the time when USC served the largest population of international students in the world. I successfully defended a doctoral dissertation on international students' acculturation and re-acculturation in 2006.

Relationship to the student and subject matter

I just met Pearl this semester. Over the years I have worked very closely on university communications, newsletters, e-newsletters, responsibility for departmental website content at 3 universities, and developed content for an on-line pre-departure orientation that has received national recognition. I have designed a first year experience survey to assess the needs of new

international students and eventually received data from over 1900 students. I directly advised international students for 14 years. As a director, I now rarely advise international students. Pearl focuses on so many areas that are important to me in terms of improving the overall communications between faculty and staff and international students as well improving the overall international student experience.

Evaluation of the topic as appropriate for the creative endeavor

This is the first document I have read for a creative endeavor as it is my second month at BSU but I can certainly vouch for its importance and relevance in the field of international education.

Evaluation of the student's approach

I was very impressed that Pearl identified the International Student Communication Specialist position as this is a fairly new specialized position in student affairs departments in higher education. When I was immersed in restructuring the International Student Services office at UW-Madison last year this was one of the positions I wished to add to the department. It is a terrific position to add if you have the budget to do so. Unfortunately, many university departments are required to do a lot with a little. So the number of international students served won't affect the ability to hire such a position as international student tuition is rarely shared with the department that provides the most services to them. Without such a budget, the staff with experience and an interest in this area would most likely be tapped to contribute to this area on a part time basis but a full time position would certainly be very useful. I have found that such a position would be essential in strategically designing and implementing departmental or divisional branding.

I thought the position description that Pearl designed was very effective and I would add assessment of international student programming (on-line surveys, focus groups, etc.) to the job

responsibilities. I also liked the position qualifications. I would post such a position as bachelor's required, Master's preferred. The only other addition to Pearl's position requirements is that I would add website and social networking experience pertaining to student organizations and/or university departments.

The training module's content is excellent. She has clearly put a lot of time in reflecting upon the needs of international students following her in-depth interviews. Pearl has made a significant contribution to educating advisors about international students' needs in the creation of this module. Not only could this information be presented in person but it could be created in the form of an on-line interactive module given the technological options available today.

It was very astute of Pearl to recognize the need to explain the role of the academic advisor to incoming students and encourage advisors on how to effectively interact with the students and properly explain the strategic way to register to ensure student satisfaction as well as graduation in a timely manner. This academic information about grading and registration can be included in an on-line pre-departure orientation initially and then followed up on in person during orientation. I plan to help design a pre-departure orientation for international students at BSU this summer and look forward to incorporate many of Pearl's recommendations.

Evaluation of the body of the project a) Quality b) Depth of treatment c) Coverage

The quality of this project is excellent. I think she provided a very comprehensive, concise and well organized training module and position recommendation. I am very impressed at her ability to design such a professional and on-target educational treatment. Her coverage of this topic was quite comprehensive. It shows a sophisticated understanding on her part of the subject matter.

Her target audience is faculty who teach or advise international students. I have learned over the years that most faculty advisors do not consider advising even in the top ten things they do. I.E.

they are not rewarded with tenure or other tangible rewards for being a good, inclusive advisor to domestic or international students. In fact, the faculty advisor who spends too much time with her/his students runs the risk of failing to publish sufficiently to secure tenure. For this module to be truly successful in academia, the university would need to provide an incentive to encourage faculty advisors to participate. From my past experience, the academic staff advisors would be more attracted to improving their skills and knowledge in this area.

Evaluation of the student's work as contributing to the field (e.g., body of knowledge)

Pearl has made a significant contribution to the field of international education in the completion of this study and recommending an effective treatment in the creation of the training module and professional position. As a director of international Student Services, I have learned a lot from her study, which better aids me in reviewing the needs of international students. I could see her presenting her data and findings at a NAFSA, International Educators conference and receiving significant interest and encouragement by the international educators attending.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Most American universities have a department dedicated to serving international students. Unless the international student services in universities learn about the students' needs and formulate strategies to improve the students' experiences on campus, the satisfaction with the university cannot be positively affected. This study has provided a glimpse into the perceptions of international graduate students and their opinions of the various experiences they have had with the different services of the university that they encounter on a personal level.

The purpose of this creative project was to audit the interactions between international graduate students and their advisers from the perspective of the students and provide recommendations for universities on relationship building communications. The goal was to explore this topic that does not feature much in literature and examine it from a organization-publics relationship stand point.

The literature review highlighted the need for internationalization in higher education institutions and the competition that exist among universities in receiving international students. A profile of the international student, with statistics from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2008, 2014) and the International Institute of Education (2015), was reported. The financial implications of admitting international students to American campuses was also reviewed. Literature on organization-public relationships pertaining to organizational reputation and relational satisfaction were also examined. It was noted that the antecedents of relational outcomes and reputation were communication behaviors, familiarity, and personal experience (Yang, 2007). Academic advising and satisfaction, and word of mouth intentions were also examined in the literature review.

An exploratory qualitative study was carried out to audit the communication patterns and preferences of international graduate students with their academic advisers or graduate assistantship supervisors. The results of the study were utilized to inform the recommendations provided in chapter five. The recommendations included a suggestion to create a communication specialist role along with the job description, and a communications plan that can be executed every semester.

With time, more participants could be included in the study to make the results more comprehensive and diverse. The final sample was six, which was rather small. If a larger number, including undergraduate students, was analyzed, a more in-depth analysis with detailed information could have been done. With more time, a quantitative study exploring the communication patterns of international students could have been carried out as a supplement to the qualitative study. Including participants from different universities would provide a robust data set that will enable the researcher to compare and contrast experiences in various universities.

The recommendations made here was meant to be a working document to begin with. Based on implementation and evaluation, the plan can be modified and tailored as per the feedback received. The plan would differ depending on the higher education institution, and the demographics of its current international student population. The ability of the individuals executing the plan to be flexible and adapt the plan to their situation specific scenarios would be highly valuable in this field.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research Integrity
 Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 2000 University Avenue
 Muncie, IN 47306-0155
 Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE: February 17, 2016

TO: Pearl Mohankumar, MA

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 858568-2

TITLE: Graduate International Student – Adviser Interactions: Research and Recommendations for Relationship Building Communications

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

DECISION DATE: February 17, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on February 17, 2016 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
	Category 2: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
	Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or

	if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
	Category 5: Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under these programs.
	Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed which contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Editorial Notes:

1. Modification Approved

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact (ORI Staff) if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

Bryan Byers, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/Director
Office of Research Integrity

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Study Title Graduate International Student – Adviser Interactions: Research and Recommendations for Relationship Building Communications

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine the communication patterns of international students with university personnel as predictors of student satisfaction of the university and international students' perceived university reputation.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be 18 years old or above, be currently enrolled as a full-time student in the graduate level, have studied at a US higher educational institution for a minimum of one academic year, and must not be a citizen of the United States.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this project, you will participate in a one-on-one interview, with the principal investigator, where you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your communication and interactions with university personnel. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the interview.

Audio or Video Tapes

For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Any names used on the audio recording will be changed to pseudonyms when the tapes are transcribed. The recordings will be stored in a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigator, for three years and will then be destroyed.

Data Confidentiality

All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data.

Storage of Data

Paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office for three years and will then be shredded. Electronic data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only members of the research team will have access to the data.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no perceived risks for participating in this study. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may quit the study at any time.

Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study

Should you experience any feelings of anxiety, there are counseling services available to you through the BSU Counseling Center on campus, Lucina Hall, Room 320, 285-1736.

Benefits

There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title Graduate International Student – Adviser Interactions: Research and Recommendations for Relationship Building Communications

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, "Graduate International Student – Adviser Interactions: Research and Recommendations for Relationship Building Communications." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:

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Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-structured One-on-one Interview Discussion Guide

Introduction

1. Welcome

Introduce PI (interviewer)

Collect data on questionnaire with demographic questions

Introduce the research topic

- Explain inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Explain purpose of the study
- Explain how the data will be used and what will be done to it after the study.
- Explain security measures for data-storage and assure confidentiality of information

2. Introduce Method

Explain that interviews are used to gather in-depth information about the respondents' perceptions and experiences.

- We learn from you
- We are only gathering information
- The interview will last for about 30 minutes
- Feel free to move around
- Point out the exit
- You can quit at any point

3. Rules

The following ground rules should be established

- Information discussed here should be kept confidential
- Turn off cellphones and electronic devices or activate silent mode
- Can interrupt the interview

4. Any questions?

5. Switch on tape recorder

6. Interview begins

Questions

1. Is there an adviser/faculty at the university that you interact with on a regular basis?
2. How do you feel about your interactions with this person?
3. Through what channel do you communicate with this person? (Email, face-to-face., etc.)
4. How satisfied are you with your communication with your adviser/faculty mentor?

5. If the communication associated with your adviser can be changed in any way, what would it be?
6. How satisfied are you with the following?
 - a. Extent to which my adviser knows and understands the problems faced by me
 - b. Extent to which the adviser's interaction motivates and stimulates an enthusiasm for meeting my goals
 - c. Extent to which my adviser listens and pays attention to me
 - d. Extent to which my adviser offers guidance for solving my academic-related problems
 - e. Extent to which our meetings are well organized
 - f. Extent to which informal communication is active and accurate
 - g. Extent to which the amount of communication in the organization is about right
7. How satisfied are you with Ball State University?
8. What do you think is the university's reputation?
9. How likely are you to recommend BSU to your peers back in your country?